A Synopsis of the Ph.D. Thesis Entitled

Reinterpretation of Myth, History and Folklore in the Select Plays of Girish Karnad : A Critical Study

: Submitted to :

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: For the Award of :

Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

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MAY - 2019

1) Introduction :

Girish Karnad (b. 1938) belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the two decades following independence, and collectively reshaped Indian theatre as a major national institution in the later twentieth century. The work of these playwrights has a historical connection with the modern theatre forms that emerged under the influence of western models in metropolises such as Calcutta and Bombay during the colonial period. Their modernity, however, is shaped by the unprecedented experience of political autonomy and new nationhood, and entails a rejection rather than continuation of colonial theater practices. In modern Indian theatre, the years leading up to and following independence in 1947 marked a period of disjunction during which both the commercialism of the Parshi stage (dominant until the 1930s) and the radical populism of the Indian peoples Theatre Association (dominant during the 1940s) became unsatisfactory models for the future development of urban drama. This sense of disconnection from the immediate past led the more ambitious post-independence form and presentational style, to forge radical connections with an older past as well as the post-colonial present in India, and to put the resources of world theatre (especially modern Euro-American theatre) to as Dharmavir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sirkar, Utpal Dutta, Habib Tanvir, G. P. Deshpande, and Mahesh Elkunchwar. Karnad is a playwright whose work reveals a determined and self-conscious effort towards a new Indian drama.

The members of Karnad's theatrical generation therefore share a number of important qualities that separate them as a group from their precursors. In varying degrees, these authors approach playwriting as a serious literary activity and drama as a complex verbal art, potentially connected to, but also independent of, theatrical practice: the play-as-meaningful-text is thus detached equally from the genres of commercialized entertainment and topical political performance. At the same time, they constitute the firstgroup of modern playwrights in India who belong simultaneously to the economies of print and performance. All of them have had notable success on the stage, while their work has also circulated in print and become available for analysis, commentary, and interpretation outside the boundaries of performance. Each playwright is committed to an indigenous language (rather than English) as his medium of original composition, and hence to the literary and performative traditions of the region where that language is dominant. But each has also participated actively in the process of interlingual translation that gives his plays national (and often international) visibility, and establishes them as contemporary classics. In yet another perspective, Karnad and his contemporaries have rendered the role of 'dramatic author' largely synonymous with that of 'theorist' and 'critic'. By advancing theoretical and polemical arguments about form, language, style, purpose, and influence in a range of rhetorical genres, they have offered the first fully developed, often antithetical theories of dramatic representation and reception in the modern period in India, and formulated competing conceptions of the role of theatre in cultural and national life.

With drama as his chosen literary form and Kannada as his principal language of original composition, Karnad certainly exemplifies the transformative practices of his generation, but he has also carved out a distinctive niche for himself with respect to subject matter, dramatic style, and authorial identity. The majority of his plays employ the narratives of myth, history, and folklore to evoke an ancient or premodern world that resonates in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present. Karnad's engagement with myth (especially certain episodes in the Mahabharata) begins with '*Yayati*' in 1961, continues in 'Bali : The Sacrifice'in 2002, and culminates in 'The fire and the Rain' in 1994. The line of history plays moves form *Tughlaq* (1964) to Tale-Danda (Death by Decapitation, 1990) and 'The Dreams of Tipu Sultan' (1997). Folktales from different periods and sources provide the basis of

Hayavadana (Horse-Head, 1971), *Naga-Mandala* (Play with a Cobra, 1977) is the only early play by Karnad with a contemporary setting - Britain during the early 1960s - and his most recent work, 'Broken Images' (2004) is the only one to be set in present day India. During the 1961-77 period, therefore, each successive play by Karnad marks a departure in a major new direction and the invention of a new form appropriate to his content - ancient myth in *Yayati*, fourteenth-century north Indian history in Tughlaq, atwelfth-century folktale interlineated with Thomas Mann's retelling of it in *Hayavadana*, and early-post colonial Britain in Anjumallige. In the later plays this quadrangulated pattern repeats itself in a different order, creating a cycle of myth-folklore-history in Bali: The Sacrifice, *Naga-Mandala*, and Tale-danda (1980-90), and a second cycle of myth-history-myth-contemporary life-folklore in The Fire and the Rain, Tipu Sultan, Bali, Broken Images, and Flowers (1994-2004).

The dominant presence of the ancient and medieval past in Karnad's drama is a result of both personal and cultural compulsions. He had argued from the beginning that the deep-rooted narratives of myth, oral history and legend constitute a vital connection between an author and his or her audience, and theatre is a particularly powerful medium for the communication of such culturally resonant fictions. Karnad belongs perhaps to the last generation of Urban Indian writers who encountered the 'great' and 'little' traditions of myth, poetry, history, legend, and folklore at first hand in their earliest childhood, and internalized them deeply enough to have their adult authorial selves shaped by them. Such a vibrant culture of orality is no longer available to the western playwright, and Karnad is fully aware that it is being rapidly eroded in India by the processes of urbanization, westernized education, and economic development. Orality and print, however, are also carefully balanced in his work. All his major plays, from Yayati to The Fire and the Rain, and Bali originate in remembered stories but depend extensively on printed sources for their textual complexity and weight. Karnad comes uncannily close, therefore, to the kind of modern writer T. S. Eliot imagined in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', one of the founding critical texts of twentieth-century modernism. Karnad's ability to contend with 'the timeless and the temporal together' is clearest in his juxtaposition of myth and history, in the simultaneous embrace of the ahistorical and the historical. The plays based on myth and folktale evoke a chronologically indeterminate (but unambiguously premodern) realm of kings and queens, goddesses and concubines,

horses and elephants, bullock carts and country fairs. They create character-types rather than individuals, but give them memorable voices, along with a local habitation and a name. The history plays draw extensively on printed sources, combine real-life individuals with fictional character, and recreate particular places at particular moments in time. More than any of his contemporaries, Karnad therefore possesses a dramatic imagination that ranges widely in time and space, and allows him to 'speak through' a remarkably diverse cast of characters.

Karnad also persistently describes playwriting as the vocation that best expresses his self-perceptions and abilities, and the identity, despite a multifaceted engagement with the media of film, television, and video, and a larger-than-life presence in the public realm. As an actor, director, screenplay-writer, high-profile administrator, and public figure Karnad had been- to use an Americanism- a 'celebrity' for more than three decades. No other contemporary author in India is more likely to be recognized on cinema and television screens or the pages of a magazine than within the covers of a printed book or on the stage, and certainly no other Indian playwright has been more visible in the national print and broadcast media. In addition, Karnad had held administrative positions in key cultural institutions, serving as Director of the film on Television Institute of India in Pune (1974-5), chair of the Sangeet NatakAkademy in New Delhi (1988-93), and Director of the Nehru Centre in London (2000-03). Yet, as the double honor of the Jnanpith Award and the KalidasaSamman (India's two most prestigious literary prizes) confirmed in 1999, Karnad makes very serious claims on our literary attention, and values the recognition of his work as a playwright above all other distinctions. He thus appears to have maintained a unique separation and balance between his contributions to 'high', 'popular', and 'official' culture- between the- responsibilities of authorship and the demands of the marketplace as well as the public sphere.

Furthermore, Karnad is atypical among contemporary playwrights in being the principal translator of his own plays, and important commentator on the nature and contexts of his drama. With the exception of *Yayati*, he has rendered all his major plays from Kannada into English, and reversed the process with three recent plays- The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (1997), Broken Images (2004), and Flowers (2004)- which he wrote originally in English and then translated into kannada. The acts of translation is both

directions indicate Karnad's equal facility in the two languages (unique in an Indian-language playwright), and his interest in a wider audience, whether a play was written originally in kannada or English. But they also indicate his desire to retain control over his plays, and occasionally to act as critic and censor of his own work. For instance, Karnad came to regard *Yayati* as part of his juvenilia, and although the play had successful productions in Kannada and Hindi, he did not translate it into English. A Hindi translation by B. R. Narayan was published in 1979, but the English translation by Priya Adarkar has not yet appeared in print. Similarly, Anjumallige and Hittina Hunja did not appear in English translations after the Kannada editions were published in 1977 and1980, again because of the authors ambivalence towards those versions.

Karnad's first play *Yayati* (1961), launched his career as a playwright, and established an approach to mythic narrative that has shaped many of the mature later plays. It reinterprets an ancient Hindu myth on the theme of responsibility and emerges almost like a self-consciously existentialist dream. Regarding this play, Karnad frankly confessed in an interview that he "wanted to tell people I had read Sartre, Camus, and others". It is a wordy, didactical play in the style of the French dramatist Jean Anouilh, but it prefigures Karnad's later work in the modernist thoroughness with which it reshapes mythical material, redistributes thematic emphases, and invents new characters to complicate the dramatic potential of the story.

Karnad's next play, *Tughlaq* (1964), marked a radical change of direction after 'Yayati', and inaugurated a second genre that has since been central to his dramaturgy. It explores the paradox of the idealistic Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq whose reign is considered to be one of the spectacular regimes of history. In connection with this play, Karnad had also revealed in course of the same interview that "he read a work of Kannada criticism which proved that many historical plays written earlier were costume plays and that no one attempted to relate a historical episode to modern sensibility like Shaw. This inspired me to write such a play in Kannada".

Karnad's third play, *Hayavadana* (1971), marked another major change of direction, not only in his playwriting but in post-independence theatre as a whole, because it was the first work to translate into notable practice the debate over the usefulness of indigenous performance genres in the development of a new,

quintessentially 'Indian' theatre. Having explored the genres of mythic-existentialist and historical drama in '*Yayati*' and '*Tughlaq*', Karnad had experienced the urge to 'begin again'. It presents the theme of human beings aspiring for the unattainable in the Brechtian pattern.

In all his plays- be the theme mythical, historical or legendary- Karnad's approach is modern. He uses the conventions and motifs of folk art. Like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements. He rightly believes that the energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values. The various conventions the chorus, the music, the apparently unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of the human and the non-human worlds- permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view. Like Bertolt Brecht, Karnad strives to break the " illusion" of thetheatre by which the spectators become so engrossed in a play that they forget, for the time being, what they are, Therefore, like Brecht, Karnad leaves the stage apparatus visible, presents synoptic announcements, has narrators directly talking to the audience to respond intellectually to the action of the play and to question it, instead of responding emotionally and merely accepting it.

2) Statement of the problem of Research(Research Topic):

Reinterpretation of Myth, History and Folklore in the select plays of Girish Karnad : A Critical Study

3) Review of Literature :

It has been observed that most of the research work done in this area focused on Karnad's use of mythology, history, politics and folktales but it is very important to reinterpret the same things. Most of the research work in this area is concerned with Karnad as a playwright and his use of mythology but the reinterpretation of Karnad's use of myth, history and folktales has been neglected by many research scholars. Hence, a dire need was felt to use his engagement with myth, history and folktales to analyze his characters. As well as how he had used these aspects as a to tell his stories. It was strongly felt that a systematic, fresh and more comprehensive study of these aspects is required.

The Selected three plays shows his engagement with myth, history as well as folktales and the techniques he employed for their effective presentation on the stage so the study becomes all-encompassing and compressive. It will also save the thesis form being theoretical, repetitive and limited.

4) Importance of the Research :

The present research work would prove useful and relevant as it would throw further light upon different aspects of the narratives of his play to evoke and ancient world that resonates in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present. The study of Karnad's narratives of myth, history and folklore as a strategy of the characterization will throw light on the innovations made by him and their relative significance. It will be a reliable documentation of Karnad's plays marks a departure in a major new direction and the invention of a new form appropriate to his content-ancient myth in '*Yayati*', fourteenth-century north Indian history in '*Tughlaq*', a Twelfth-century folktale interlineated with Thomas Mann's retelling of it in *Hayavadana*. The study will provide the researchers with the detailed discussion on the process of characterization as well as the process of use of myth, history and folktales.

A multidimensional view will be taken to understand the issues raised by the author with the help of the discussions, views and counter-views by various critics, scholars etc., which will be equally valuable to the scholars, readers and researchers.

5) Hypothesis:

The present research work aims to explore Karnad's use of myth, history and folklore. So far no detailed and comprehensive work is done in this area. Following are some of the major issues of the hypothesis for the present research work :

1. Karnad's plays effectively weave the contemporary context in their structure.
2. Contemporary socio-political and cultural issues are dramatized through the use of myth, history, legend and folklore.
3. Karnad also takes important problems of caste, heredity, religion and gender and knits them into the texture of his plays.
4. Karnad's strategy of characterization has significantly influenced and contributed to the theatre today as well.

6) Data Collection:

The data required for the present research work will be collected in the following two ways :

6.1 Primary Data :

The primary data will be collected and used extensively from the plays written by Girish Karnad. These plays are : *Yayati* 1961, *Tughlaq* 1972, and *Hayavadana* 1975.

6.2 Secondary Data :

The secondary data will be collected from the critical books, journals, articles, interviews, critical essays, web material, newspapers, different reports published on Girish Karnad and his select works. As well as secondary data will be collected from various state, national and international level seminars and conferences.

7) Aims and Objective of the Research Work :

Through this present literary research work knowledge would be advanced specially regarding Karnad's use of myth, history and folklore and some useful technical aspects of his writing would be studied. It would broaden the mind and sharpen the critical insight as far as the use of his techniques is concerned. Following aims and objective will be pursuit :

1. To form an overall idea of Karnad's use of myth, history and folktales.
2. To study the contemporary context of Karnad's plays.
3. To comment on the theme of selected plays of Karnad in the light of the title of the present research.
4. To focus the contemporary relevance of the selected plays of the Girish Karnad.
5. To understand the major and minor characters in the selected plays *Yayati* 1961, *Tughlaq* 1972, and *Hayavadana* 1975.
6. To understand the interrelationships between different characters of the plays under close study.
7. To explain the role of each characters in the selected plays of Girish Karnad.

8) Proposed work plan / Chapter Scheme :

Following will be the proposed work plan / chapter scheme of the present research work -

Chapter I : Introduction

The first chapter will focus on the introductory details of the theme of the dissertation, the background study of 20th century Indian theatre, the dramatist and the importance of the title of the research work. The concepts of myth, history and folktales as the strategy of characterization will also be fully explained. This will also explain the objectives, hypothesis, scope and limitations of the present study and will focus on the significance of the critical analysis methodology used in the present research work.

Chapter II : Reinterpretation of an Ancient Hindu Myth: *Yayati*

Thesecond chapter will be on the detailed reinterpretation of an ancient Hindu myth with special reference to Karnad's play 'Yayati'. This chapterwill explain how Karnad restructures the story of Yayati as an ironic drama of discontent, futility, and death. Yayati is a self-centered epicurean who invites the curse because he cannot overcome his desire for Sharmishtha, although Devyani has warned him about the destructive consequences of his choice. *Yayati* is based on the theme of responsibility. *Yayati* himself is responsible for his downfall. But he hesitates to take the responsibility of the things which have come to him as reactions to his actions. This chapter will focus significantly on the reinterpretation of an ancient hindu myth with suitable references and critical comments.

Chapter III : A Theatrical Representation of History: *Tughlaq*

The third chapter will deal with the interpretation of history and its minute study with special reference to Karnad's play '*Tughlaq*'. This chapter will focus on the fact that *Tughlaq* is the historical play having the tumultuous reign of a great medieval King, Muhammad Tughlaq. The miseries of the people during the journey, the corruption that was huge and endemic, and Tughlaq's progressive alienation and isolation from his people are dramatically portrayed. The play ends with scenes of utter chaos and misery in

the kingdom, and Tughlaq being left alone, having been abandoned by those who survived him, that is. This chapter will explore the theatrical representation of history through Tughlaq as a complex character and how Karnad explores the dramatic potentials of Tughlaq's complexity very effectively.

Chapter IV : A Folktale of Human Beings aspiring for the Unattainable: *Hayavadana*

The fourth chapter will be on the reinterpretation of folktale with special reference to Karnad's play '*Hayavadana*'. This chapter will explain how Karnad has used the folktale as a strategy of characterization. This chapter will also deal with the source of the play that goes back to Somdevas 'Brihadkathasaritsagar', and ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit but particularly this play could be traced to Thomas Mann's famous story 'The Transposed Head'. *Hayavadana* itself is written in the regional Indian language Kannada and uses elements of Indian yakshagana and natak theater. *Hayavadana* is a story of two close friends and their love for a woman. It is a part of this research that how Karnad has dealt with this theme of love to represent a folktale of human beings who are aspiring for the unattainable.

Chapter V : Conclusion.

The fifth chapter concludes the present research. It summarizes the overall findings of the research work. Along with certain concluding remarks, it also explains the reinterpretation of how Karnad had used myth, history and folktale in his plays. Finally, it is rounded-up by advising the scope for the further research.

9) Research Methodology :

The present research does not call for any fieldwork and hence M.L.A.method of research would be followed.The research will be based on the critical analysis of Karnad's strategy of characterization as well as critical study of his selected plays, the comments on his plays by critics etc. Hence, thecritical analysis will be the central agenda for the proposed research.Since the proposed research work needs no fieldwork, the texts of selected plays, the reference books, journals, websites etc. will be referred as the source of research.

10) Places of Work and Facilities Available :

The present research work will be carried out at the PG Research Centre in English, Department of English, Dayanand College of Arts, Latur (MS), which has a well-equipped library with a good collection of books on drama and theatre and Internet facilities are also available.

11) Probable date of Research Completion :

The present research is proposed to be completed within the time limit as stipulated by Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded.

12) Bibliography :

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Proforma for Approval of Research Project Proposal

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